

704th takes every precaution possible

Specialty soldiers comprise security team in Iraq

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KALSU, Iraq - The 704th Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Company responds to and diffuses improvised explosive devices (IEDs) throughout the 155th Brigade Combat Team's area of operations. Lately, they've had fewer calls in Task Force Eaglehorse's AO.

Task Force 2/11 Armored Cavalry Regiment, nicknamed Task Force Eaglehorse, is one of five attached to the 155th BCT.

Stationed at FOB Kalsu, the task force is located 30 miles south of Baghdad. Compared to the number of IEDs emplaced against other BCT task forces, "2/11 has had the largest IED decrease since we arrived here in January," according to Assistant Intelligence Officer 1st Lt. Michael Simpson.

IED activity in the Eaglehorse AO, AO battle, has decreased for a variety of reasons. One is that Task Force 2/11 has worked with Iraqi security forces to capture or neutralize a large number of the insurgent leaders in AO battle.

Another is that key players from Task Force Eaglehorse and the Iraqi government are revitalizing local businesses. New projects to rebuild the area have created new opportunities and jobs.

Also, in the wake of Operation Thunder Woodstock - a recent information and targeting campaign led by the Iraqi Army - IED activity in AO battle has comparatively dropped.

That doesn't stop EOD soldiers and their security team from taking every precaution possible.

"If anything, we've become more attentive not less, given the slowdown," said Staff Sgt. Jacob Diaz, security team leader. The team escorts personnel to reported IED sites. Upon arrival at a site, the team provides individual security for personnel, they ensure that the area around the EOD soldiers is cordoned off, and they ensure that no secondary IEDs are nearby.

The EOD security team is unique because they are not a part of the 704th EOD Company. The team consists, rather, of a mixture of Task Force Eaglehorse soldiers - men who vary between having combat arms and combat support backgrounds.

Infantrymen, medics, mechanics, fuel handlers, and scouts are among the many specialty soldiers who comprise the security team.

Once the EOD command post receives an IED call, the CP immediately informs the security team. The security team then has 10 minutes to report to the command post. The team must arrive in full uniform; they must have their weapons, radios and vehicles ready to execute a mission.

Within 15 minutes after the IED call, the team must choose and disseminate primary and alternate routes to the IED site. No more than 30 minutes after the call, the patrol must depart the FOB. From there, the patrol conducts a tactical movement en route to the reported IED.

Before the number of IEDs in AO battle decreased, it was very common for the EOD patrol to receive one to ten follow-on missions after the first IED call. Each mission lasts anywhere from 30 minutes to two hours. The EOD security team is on call at all times.

Since Task Force Eaglehorse deployed to Iraq in January, the EOD soldiers working in AO battle have responded to several hundred reports of IEDs. No EOD or security team soldier has been killed in action.

According to Diaz, "So far, we've run a tight ship. Our hard work and discipline are what have gotten us this far. Although the threat is getting smaller, until we set foot back in the United States, this is the way we plan to keep doing things."

For more information about the EOD security team and Task Force Eaglehorse, visit www.eaglehorse.org.